We Thought You’d Like To Know

Every denomination is experiencing tension, and Southern Baptists are no exception. Of course, tension can be healthy. It serves to clarify beliefs. But tension also has a down side. It can generate misleading statements and create confusion in the local church. We know that some may be struggling to sort out truth from fiction.

Because this is so, we offer you these simple position statements which reflect the actions of the Convention and its entities. We hope that they will prove helpful to you.

Priesthood of All Believers

We affirm the priesthood of all believers. Laypersons have the same right as ordained ministers to communicate with God, interpret Scripture, and minister in Christ’s name. That is why the Convention requires strong lay involvement on its boards.

This doctrine is first and foremost a matter of responsibility and servanthood, not privilege and license.

It is, of course, a perversion of this doctrine to say that all views are equally valid, that you can believe anything and still be a Baptist, or that the pastor has no unique leadership role.

Soul Competency

We affirm soul competency, the accountability of each person before God. Your family cannot save you. Neither can your church. It is a matter between you and God. Authorities can’t force belief or unbelief. They shouldn’t try.

Against this backdrop of religious freedom, it’s important for us Baptists to set forth our convictions. By stating them in a forthright manner, we provide nonbelievers with a clear choice.

Creeds and Confessions

In some groups, statements of belief have the same authority as Scripture. We call this creedalism. Baptists also make statements of belief, but all of them are revisable in light of Scripture. The Bible is the final word.

Because of this distinction, we are generally more comfortable with the word “confession.” Still, we are “creedal” in the sense that we believe certain things, express those beliefs, and order our institutions accordingly. There have always been Baptist limits. And within these limits, there have always been Baptist preferences.

Women In Ministry

Women participate equally with men in the priesthood of all believers. Their role is crucial, their wisdom, grace and commitment exemplary. Women are an integral part of our Southern Baptist boards, faculties, mission teams, writer pools, and professional staffs. We affirm and celebrate their Great Commission impact.

While Scripture teaches that a woman’s role is not identical to that of men in every respect, and that pastoral leadership is assigned to men, it also teaches that women are equal in value to men.

Church and State

We stand for a free church in a free state. Neither one should control the affairs of the other. We support the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, with its “establishment” and “free exercise” clauses.

We do, of course, acknowledge the legitimate interplay of these two spheres. For example, it is appropriate for the state to enact and enforce fire codes for church nurseries. It is also appropriate for ministers to offer prayer at civic functions. Neither the Constitution nor Baptist tradition would build a wall of separation against such practices as these.

Sexuality and Sanctity of Life

We affirm God’s plan for marriage and sexual intimacy— one man, one woman, for life. Procreation is a gift from God, a precious test reserved for marriage. At the moment of conception, a new being enters the universe, a human being, a being created in God’s Image. This human being deserves our protection, whatever the circumstances of conception.

Homosexuality is not a “valid alternative lifestyle.” The Bible condemns it as a sin. It is not, however, unforgivable sin. The redemption available to all sinners is available to homosexuals. They too, may become new creations in Christ.

Mission

We ask the people of the world to conform to Christ and His word, and not to our merely human traditions. We seek to lift up national leadership in the countries where we serve, and to respect the cultural expressions of their Christian faith— we honor the indigenous principle in missions. We cannot, however, compromise doctrine or give up who we are to win the favor of those we try to reach or those with whom we desire to work. This would rob our efforts of their integrity and life.

The priority is evangelism which results in churches. This priority is consistent with strong social ministries, including medical care, emergency famine relief, water projects, and agricultural assistance.

Autonomy

We affirm the autonomy of the local church. Each church is free to determine its own membership and to set its own course under the headship of Jesus. It may enter into alliance with other churches as it chooses, so long as those other churches are willing.

The same is true for other Baptist bodies— local associations; state conventions; national conventions. They too, may determine their membership and set their own course.

If, in its autonomy a Baptist body expels a church from its fellowship, it does not negate that church’s autonomy. The church is perfectly free to go on with its business— but not as a member of that larger Baptist body.

Cooperation

The Cooperative Program of missions is integral to the Southern Baptist genius. In the early days of our Convention, churches were bombarded with special appeals from various missions causes. The material resources of each ministry were dependent upon the persistence and eloquence of the spokesmen. This societal approach to missions was unevan and exhausting.

In 1925, Southern Baptists chose to join the causes of state and national missions in a denominational plan of unified giving. This Cooperative Program laid the foundation for extraordinary growth and fruitfulness. The Partners in the Harvest campaign celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Cooperative Program in the Year 2000 with goals of 1 million baptisms, unprecedented volunteer mission involvement, and $750 million in Cooperative Program and other missions gifts.
We invite you to consider the convictions of these Southern Baptists. Their stand on Scripture and its treatment in our schools and lives is uncompromising. As we remember the way in which God has blessed the Convention through the years, we should keep her scriptural commitments in mind.

BASIL MANLY

Founding President of First Baptist Theological Seminary
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1895-1934)

President, President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

B.B. CARROLL

First President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1858-1895)

Southern Baptist Church

B. M. CARROLL

First President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1858-1895)

First Southern Baptist

B. M. CARROLL

First President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1858-1895)

We accept the Scriptures as an all-sufficient and infallible rule of faith and practice, and insist upon the absolute inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God. Wherever the Word has its perfect fulfillment, either of practical belief, or practical action, or its own existence, God is revealed to us. More and more men come to see the Word of God and the practical power of our confession that “A truth with the Lord is the foundation of all authority.”

J. A. BROADUS

President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Baptist Sunday School Board

J. M. FROST

President, Southern Baptist Convention (1923-25)

Baptist Sunday School Board

J. A. MOWELL

President, First Baptist Seminary

President, Baptist Sunday School Board

L.R. SCARBOROUGH

Second President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1895 - 1934)

President, Mercer University

The Modern Church

E.Y. MULLINS

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JAMES B. DOE

President, Mercer University

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JOHN A. BROADUS

President, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

H.M. CARROLL

President, First Baptist Sunday School Board

The Modern Church

Baptist Sunday School Board

What if the appeal is made to Biblical Interpretation?

My faith is the faith of a simple plain Baptist. I accept it from my father and Dr. B.H. Carroll the verbal inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ, His perfect humanity, the historical narratives given by biblical authors are indeed accurate and reliable as given by those authors.

If we assume that the inspiration of the Bible is only partial where are we to stop? Every man must then select still other methods of interpretation of the English Bible.

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Laity
Mobilization of the laity is one of the great stories of the era; each year more than 300,000 go out on special short-term mission and disaster relief projects, at home and abroad.

Literature
LifeWay Christian Resources is the world’s largest publisher of religious materials; its Sunday school literature is the choice of approximately 37,000 Southern Baptist churches; orders come as well from churches of other denominations and from more than 120 foreign countries around the world.

Academics
The scope of Southern Baptist seminary education is unmatched by any other denomination. America’s 243 theological schools average about 258 in enrollment. The six Southern Baptist seminaries average about 2,372. One out of every five theological students in the U.S. is enrolled in a Southern Baptist seminary.

Innovation and Efficiency
In an effort to provide Southern Baptists with interactive resources and information, the Southern Baptist Convention has created a new website. SBC.net provides you with access to important Southern Baptist documents, quick links to each SBC entity, and features an online prayer room where you can intercede for Southern Baptist needs around the world. You can reach our website at: http://www.sbc.net

Accountability
Financial and programmatic accountability are hallmarks of the Southern Baptist Convention; the public record is detailed and extensive.

The Press
Baptist Press is the national news service of Southern Baptists. It is a cooperative system, involving scores of national and state contributors.

Ethnicity
Each Sunday, Southern Baptists in America worship in more than 200 languages and dialects; ethnic growth is strong in the SBC. African-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic representation on the boards and professional staffs is growing.

Biblical Interpretation
Within broad parameters, there has always been, and will continue to be, liberty of interpretation in our institutions; from millennialism to predestination to missiology to polity. Southern Baptist faculty and staff espouse a range of views within a framework of biblical inerrancy.

Growth
Southern Baptists average five new congregations each day; the Convention has more than 42,000 churches and is over the 16-million-member mark.

Moral Concerns
The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission is leading Southern Baptists to study and act on a broad front; a survey of recent issues of LIGHT shows treatment of euthanasia, television, racism, gambling, world hunger, the environment, AIDS, world peace, pornography, alcohol, the homeless, fetal tissue research, cloning, abortion, persecution of Christians, and religious liberty.

Further Reading
There is no substitute for the original text. We urge you to read such primary sources as:
• The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message
• www.baptist2baptist.net
• SBC resolutions on priesthood of believers (1988), women in ministry (1984), etc.
• ERLC publications, SALT and LIGHT

For these items and more information, contact:
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